

Memorandum

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Eric Vorwald, AICP
Planning & Zoning Manager

RE: **Creating and Incentivizing Housing Options**

DATE: January 27, 2022

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Planning Commission with information regarding options to increase the number of multi-bedroom dwelling units in the City. These options are being provided for discussion only at this time. Based on the discussions with the Planning Commission, staff will refine the concepts identified herein and prepare draft language to support the proposals. As with any proposals of this nature, a legal review will also need to be conducted to ensure consistency with state statute.

Overview

Since the adoption of the Form Based Code, the City's gateways have been experiencing significant redevelopment. The majority of these new structures include multiple dwelling units, but the number of multi-bedroom units lags greatly to studio and single bedroom units. Market factors are responsible for a large percentage of this; however, the City Council has expressed an interest in encouraging the development of dwellings with three or more bedrooms. With that in mind, this memo identifies several options for fulfilling the goals of Council within the land use regulations. Specific options will be discussed including mechanisms to implement these options.

Option 1 – Amend Dimensional Standards in Residential Zoning Districts

The City of Winooski is limited in land that is not currently developed, but does have many parcels of land that could be viewed as under developed. Specifically, many of the lots in the City are narrow, but have extensive lot depth. This is particularly evident in the areas around Hickok Street, West Street, St. Peter Street, and West Spring Street. There are other areas of the City that have deep, narrow lots, but these locations are the most prevalent. Table 1 provides information on the lot depth along these streets and Table 2 provides information on lot width. For reference, all these properties are located in the Residential C Zoning District. This district requires as minimum lot width of 50 feet with a minimum lot depth of 60 feet. This would result in a lot that is 3,000 square feet in size. However, the minimum lot size required in this district is 7,500 square feet; more than double the result of the minimum dimensional standards.



TABLE 1 AVERAGE LOT DEPTHS - SELECTED STREET FRONTAGES				
STREET NAME	BLOCK SECTION	NUMBER OF PARCELS	MINIMUM LOT DEPTH	AVERAGE LOT DEPTH
Hickok Street	River Street to Elm Street	34	60 feet	158.9 feet
Hickok Street	Elm Street to Pine Street	19		157.8 feet
West Street	River Street to Elm Street	32		157.1 feet
West Street	Elm Street to Pine Street	17		164.3 feet
West Spring Street	Malletts Bay Avenue to North Street	20		146.3 feet
St. Peter Street	Malletts Bay Avenue to North Street	27		139.0 feet
SUMMARY		149		153.9 feet

TABLE 2 AVERAGE LOT WIDTHS - SELECTED STREET FRONTAGES				
STREET NAME	BLOCK SECTION	NUMBER OF PARCELS	NUMBER OF PARCELS < 50' WIDE	AVERAGE LOT WIDTH
Hickok Street	River Street to Elm Street	34	11	56.9 feet
Hickok Street	Elm Street to Pine Street	19	3	58.9 feet
West Street	River Street to Elm Street	32	8	61.1 feet
West Street	Elm Street to Pine Street	17	4	68.3 feet
West Spring Street	Malletts Bay Avenue to North Street	20	6	56.9 feet
St. Peter Street	Malletts Bay Avenue to North Street	27	10	54.9 feet
SUMMARY		149	42	59.5 feet



There are many lots within the City that do not meet the minimum standards for the district where they are located. This is either based on lot width, lot depth, overall square footage, or a combination of the three. Table 3 identifies several specific examples where this occurs.

TABLE 3 ACTUAL LOT DIMENSIONS - SELECTED ADDRESSES				
PROPERTY ADDRESS	ZONING DISTRICT	REQUIRED LOT DEPTH (ACTUAL LOT DEPTH)	REQUIRED LOT WIDTH (ACTUAL LOT WIDTH)	REQUIRED SQUARE FOOTAGE (ACTUAL SQUARE FOOTAGE)
285 Weaver Street 2 units	Residential B	100 feet (87.9 feet)	75 feet (65 feet)	7,500 ft ² (5,227 ft ²)
285X Weaver Street 1 unit	Residential B	100 feet (81.9 feet)	75 feet (65 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,920 ft ²)
33 West Street 2 units	Residential C	60 feet (52.3 feet)	50 feet (32.9 feet)	7,500 ft ² (2,178 ft ²)
35 West Street 1 unit	Residential C	60 feet (108.1 feet)	50 feet (33 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,484 ft ²)
65 Maple Street 2 units	Residential C	60 feet (60.4 feet)	50 feet (74 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,920 ft ²)
69 Maple Street 1 unit	Residential C	60 feet (67.9 feet)	50 feet (74 feet)	7,500 ft ² (4,365 ft ²)
53 Maple Street 2 units	Residential C	60 feet (73 feet)	50 feet (64 feet)	7,500 ft ² (4,791 ft ²)
53X Maple Street 2 units	Residential C	60 feet (64 feet)	50 feet (55 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,049 ft ²)
32 LeClair Street 1 unit	Residential B	100 feet (61 feet)	75 feet (60.9 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,920 ft ²)
85 LeClair Street 1 unit	Residential B	100 feet (52.6 feet)	75 feet (59.8 feet)	7,500 ft ² (3,049 ft ²)
16 George Street 1 unit	Residential B	100 feet (57.6 feet)	75 feet (68.4 feet)	7,500 ft ² (4,791 ft ²)
18 George Street 1 unit	Residential B	100 feet (65.4 feet)	75 feet (68.5 feet)	7,500 ft ² (4,791 ft ²)



As was recommended in the memo from the Housing Commission dated December 02, 2021, the Planning Commission may consider amending the dimensional standards for development to better align with our current parcels. This could take on the form of changes to any portion of the minimum standards including width, depth, or coverage. These changes could promote subdivision of properties to create additional lots or allow for additional structures to be built.

Considerations for Changes to Dimensional Standards

There are several situations that should be considered in the discussion of adjustments to the minimum dimensional standards. These items are outlined below and include both pros and cons to be accounted for. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but could provide avenues for additional dwellings to be built within the City.

Changes to the Minimum Lot Requirements

The Planning Commission may consider outright changes to the minimum lot requirements including depth, width, and square footage. The City is almost completely built out, therefore there is limited available land for development. Additionally, the City is completely served by public water and wastewater, thereby eliminating the need for additional land to support a well and septic system on each lot. These factors could support outright changes to the minimum lot dimensions to create the potential for additional development to occur.

Planned Unit Developments

The reduction in lot dimensions, and particularly the square footage, could increase the number of units built on an individual lot as part of a Planned Unit Development (PUD). PUDs take the overall size of a property, and divide the total square footage by the minimum required square footage for the district where it is located to determine the total number of lots that could be created. This number is then multiplied by the maximum number of units that can be built in the zoning district to determine the maximum number of units for the PUD.

For example, under the current standards, a property that is 1 acre in size (43,560 square feet) and located in the Residential C Zoning District (minimum lot size of 7,500 square feet and a maximum of three total units) could construct 15 total units (43,560 divided by 7,500 equals 5 possible lots). If the minimum square footage were reduced to 5,000, this would result in 8 total lots and a possible 24 units. In either scenario the maximum building configuration would be two units, since this zoning district does not permit multi-unit dwellings. It may be possible to have two different minimum lot sizes to limit the impacts that a PUD could have on existing neighborhoods, but this will require a legal review.



Double Frontage Lots

Another possible approach could be to allow for lots with two frontages to utilize a smaller overall square footage to accommodate subdivision. As an example, there are approximately 10 lots along West Allen Street that have access to both West Allen Street and West Canal Street. These lots all have adequate lot depth and width to meet the minimum dimensional standards, but not enough square footage to be subdivided. If the dimensional standards had a caveat for double frontage lots, it would allow for these lots, and any others with frontage on two roadways in the City, to subdivide if possible. For reference, there are double frontage lots between Whitney Street and Manseau Street; and between Roland Court and Gorge Road.

Option 2 – Amend the Land Use Table

A second option that could accommodate additional development without amending the dimensional standards would be to reevaluate the land use table and make adjustments to accommodate additional development. This could take several different forms, including adjustments to where and how multi-unit structures are permitted, and allowing for a second primary structure on a lot.

Multi-unit Development

Currently, the land use table (Section 2.4 of the Unified Land Use and Development Regulations) only permits multi-unit development in the non-residential land use categories (except the Industrial and Public Zoning Districts). A consideration for the Planning Commission, which has been previously discussed, would be to permit multi-unit development as part of a Planned Unit Development (PUD). PUDs are considered major subdivisions and require review and approval through the Development Review Board, including notification to adjacent property owners.

Allowing multi-unit developments with PUDs could be limited to a specific maximum number of units, and could maintain the maximum height limit of the district. This would allow for the same number of units permitted under the PUD, but provide options for configuration of the units. This can have the effect of reducing building costs since fewer foundations need to be established, and can cluster the buildings more compactly thereby preserving more open space. Additional provisions can be incorporated that increase the exterior setbacks, or require other amenities to be included for allowing multi-unit buildings.

Second Primary Structure

Currently, the residential zoning districts permit a detached cottage as a conditional use. Detached cottages are limited to 1,000 square feet in habitable floor area, and are reviewed by the Development Review Board as a conditional use, which requires notification to adjacent properties owners and a public hearing. If the detached cottage was treated like a second primary unit, this could accommodate additional dwelling units on existing lots, without the need



to subdivide. Amendments to the maximum lot coverage may need to be considered, however this would allow for a second dwelling to be established without the size limitation thereby adding additional units.

Removing Single-Unit Zoning

Currently, the land use table has one zoning district where only single-unit dwellings are permitted. The Residential A (R-A) Zoning District only permits single-unit dwellings and accessory dwellings by right, and detached cottages as a conditional use. This zoning district also requires the most land area (10,000 square feet). This means that the residential zoning district that consumes the most land area per lot allows the fewest options for dwelling units. In addition, by prohibiting two-unit dwellings, if a property in the R-A Zoning District were to establish an accessory dwelling in the primary structure (as permitted by right) and the owner of the property no longer lived on site, this second unit would be a violation of the regulations. Corrective action would be needed including the removal of the features that allow the accessory dwelling to function independently, including the kitchen amenities.

Option 3 – Amend the Parking Regulations

A third option for consideration is to revise the minimum parking standards related to multi-bedroom dwelling units. Section 4.12 of the Unified Land Use and Development Regulations outlines the minimum required parking for use categories and zoning districts. Specifically, residential units in one of the residential zoning districts (R-A, R-B, or R-C) requires a minimum of two spaces for each dwelling unit, regardless of size, and one space for accessory dwellings, including detached cottages. Residential uses in other zoning districts (Central Business District, General Commercial, and Gateway) establish a minimum number of parking spaces based on the number of bedrooms. This can act as a deterrent to the establishment of multi-bedroom dwellings in these zoning districts, since additional parking is required. Table 4 includes the existing minimum parking requirements for residential uses as outlined in Section 4.12.

TABLE 4 MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS as currently included in Section 4.12	
USE	BASE PARKING REQUIREMENTS
Residential in the R-A, R-B, and R-C districts	2.0 space[s]/dwelling unit, except 1.0 space/accessory unit
Residential – in all other districts	1.0 space/dwelling unit + .50 space/3 bedroom or larger dwelling unit + 1 space for every 4 units (calculated at increments of 4)



As indicated in the table, not all dwellings are treated equally. A single unit dwelling in the Residential A Zoning District may have four or five bedrooms, but still only needs two parking spaces. Where a three-bedroom unit in the Gateway Zoning District would need to have 1.5 (effectively two) parking spaces. Similarly, an accessory dwelling unit (or detached cottage) could be established on a lot in the Residential A Zoning District and have three bedrooms, but would only need one parking space. Finally, multi-unit buildings are required to have one additional parking space for every four units included. This is presumed to accommodate visitors or tenants with multiple vehicles, however there is no accommodation for this in the residential zoning districts, where households could own just as many vehicles, if not more, resulting in additional storage of vehicles on public streets.

Amendments to Parking Minimums

One consideration for amendments to the minimum parking standards that may help encourage multi-bedroom dwellings would be to eliminate the need for the additional .50 spaces for units with three or more bedrooms. This would treat all dwelling units equally for non-residential zoning districts and could support the development of more units with three or more bedrooms. While there is no guarantee this change would result in more multi-bedroom units, this provision has been identified as a potential deterrent.

Another consideration would be to eliminate the need for the additional space with four or more units, or consider a threshold for when this would be required. For example, an additional space for four or more units may be required when a development has 12 or more units. This would allow smaller developments to occupy smaller lots and not need to provide additional parking on-site. An alternative to a minimum threshold would be to change the requirements. As an example, a consideration could be to require an additional space for every five units (or other increment). As with establishing a threshold, an increase in the increment could allow smaller lots to be developed without the need for additional parking.

Amendments to Parking Minimums to Support Affordability

A further consideration of amendments to the minimum parking standards, would be to target these amendments to support multi-bedroom units that are affordable. As an example, a developer may be given relief from parking all together, in exchange for any dwelling unit that has a minimum of three bedrooms, and is also affordable to residents making a certain percentage of the City or County median income. Based on the 2019 U.S. Census, the median household income in Winooski was \$51,728. The median household income for Chittenden County was \$73,647. This means that Winooski's median household income was 70% below the county median household income. Most measures of affordability are based on a county level or Metropolitan Statistical Area level, which means that many units that are listed as affordable are still out of reach. In order to create more housing that is affordable to residents in the City, additional incentives should be considered, including full relief from parking for certain circumstances.



As noted in Table 4, there are several components to parking that could be utilized for relief. Several options for consideration would be:

1. Dwelling units that meet specific criteria are exempt from the additional .5 spaces for multi bedroom units
2. Dwelling units that meet specific criteria are exempt from being counted towards the unit multiplier for additional spaces
3. Dwelling units that meet specific criteria are exempt from minimum parking standards all together

These are three potential options to consider in order to incentive multi-bedroom dwellings that are also affordable. These options could be used together or individually. Also, caps could be placed on the number of units that would be eligible for such incentives; or a sliding scale could be used to allow a certain number of units to take advantage of one incentive, while additional units would be eligible for other incentives.

Next Steps

So much of housing construction, design, and layout is driven by market forces that cannot be contemplated through land use regulations. There is no guarantee that the options outlined herein will result in the creation of multi-bedroom units; for sale or for rent. With that said, the options for the City of Winooski to create opportunities for these housing types and configurations to be developed are limited. In order for the City to accommodate a greater mix of housing choices for various income levels, changes to the land use regulations will be needed.

The Planning Commission should discuss the options presented herein and identify any concerns, challenges, needs for additional information, or additional options for consideration. Staff will be looking for direction from the Planning Commission on what opportunities may exist for changes to the land use regulations to support the creation of desired housing options. Staff will draft language based on Planning Commission input for review at future meetings.

